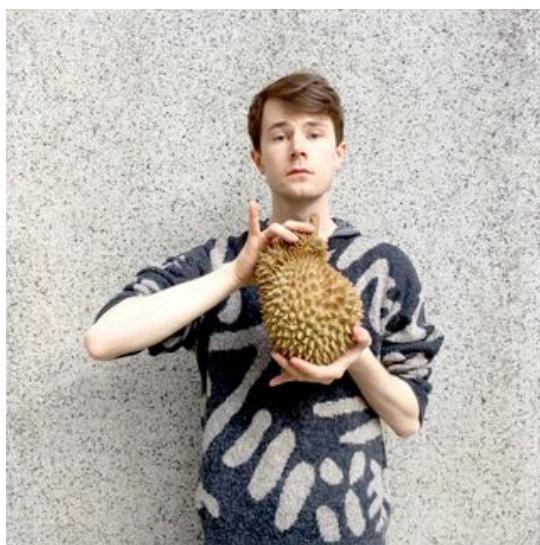


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Derek Piotr - An interview with the electronic music composer. "We're in this life for satisfaction... we're not in this life to be understood."



Derek Piotr is a Polish born electronic music composer who now resides in Connecticut. In his teens, he became increasingly interested in electronic sounds as well as world music and started experimenting and creating compositions on his laptop. Through trial and error and perseverance, his compositions began to take on a unique identity. With a few albums under his belt, Derek has just released a new album entitled "Bahar". On this new collection of electronic compositions, Derek decided to add woodwinds while still maintaining the classic static sounds and unusual voice loop phrasing from past releases. I recently conversed with Derek about his music.

R.V.B. - Hello Derek, how are you doing today? What a beautiful day we have here in the northeast.

D.P. - Yes, it's amazing. I'm in Connecticut right now.

R.V.B. - Are you anywhere near Bridgeport?

D.P. - I'm about a 40 minute drive away.

R.V.B. - You're right across the pond... as they say. Thanks for taking the time to speak with me. Were you born in Poland?

D.P. - Yes I was.

R.V.B. - When did you come to the United States?

D.P. - I was really young and I don't remember it at all. I was about 2 or 3.

R.V.B. - What kind of music were you exposed to at a young age?

D.P. - I came to music super late. I remember being in school and everybody else had a band. It wasn't until I was 15 or 16, when I got into electronic music. My dad had a couple of rock records. There wasn't much listening that went on in my house but I did have this CD ROM called Encarta encyclopedia. It had a multi-media library. The wall of music tour on that, was really important to me. I was listening to music from Asia and Africa, and that was really kind of interesting to me. As I got older, I started listening to pop music. I listened to Bjork at some point and through the local record store, I was recommended to people like Autechre and Underworld, and some weirder electronic music. I really didn't listen to music at my own speed until I was 13 or 14. That was the stuff I started with. I knew the record store owner in our town really well. His name was Dennis and the store was called "Disc & Dat."

R.V.B. - With that starting point, did you take any music courses in high school

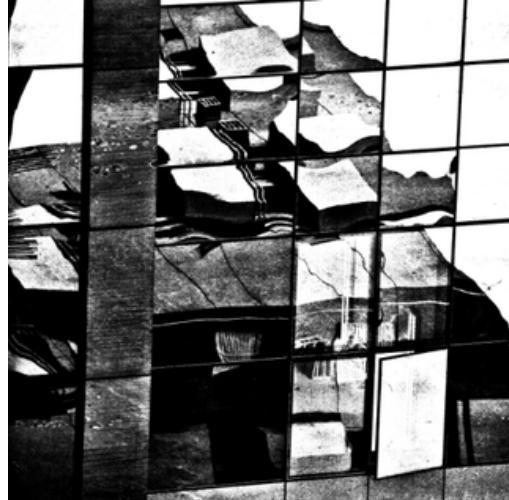


and in college?

D.P. - Yeah. I was always in the choir from middle school until high school. I took clarinet for a while and when I was in my senior year I took advanced placement music theory. I went to Columbia for a little tiny bit to do music theory. I figured out pretty fast that it wasn't for me. I think because I make electronic music, it felt like the theory part was a little restricting. I was already making electronic music before I got into the theory stuff. I felt I could do my own thing with it.

R.V.B. - As far as electronic music... when you start out to compose a piece or a song, do you start out combining sounds and then build on top of it?

D.P - 9 out of 10 times yeah. Generally I don't record that much. I have a library of sounds that I use. I make folders every month with short pieces that I make. Then I go in and edit them. It's hard to say what fits and what doesn't because sometimes in the space of two weeks, I'll use the same recording... the first and second time it doesn't happen and the fourth or fifth time it does happen. There is no logic as to why. I have certain sounds that I like, like cutting up voice up into really tiny fragments. I listen to a lot of glitchy' music. I like noises and glitches. I guess there are esthetic properties that I look for but I think sometimes my songs turn out more like songs and sometimes they turn out a little more abstract. There's never a clear cut reason as to why. I couldn't tell you why one song needs a chorus and one song barely has any voice in it at all. It's whatever wins at the end of the day that I'm working on... a genre or a form. It just takes on whatever life it's gonna take on. Sometimes it's easier to tell if it's going to be a pop song. Then I'll have to make the chorus its own section. So that's a little bit different, but then sometimes I'll just cut my voice a hundred different ways and that turns into part of the



instrumental of whatever I'm working on.

R.V.B. - I think it's very interesting. I get it. You have to have kind of an open mind. I know a lot of my classic rock buddies wouldn't get it. You add a variety of things and you don't stay within the 12 tone box.

D.P. - Right. Not just the 12 tones with that, but I think I'm looking for something that's compelling and hopefully something that's beautiful at the end of the day. I'm using any means to that end. It's not that I ignore the 12 tones. I'm using whatever tools in the box that I can to make something. I use everything beyond 12 tone scales. I use every scale imaginable and every sound imaginable.

R.V.B. - What comes out is something very unique.

D.P. - Yeah, I guess so. When I started making work, I thought John Cage was the thing and Bjork had her heyday and people were kind of exposed to stuff that was

pretty out there. I still get people that don't really know how to describe my music. When I started, I thought people would sort of have an angle on it already. I still is something really unique for people... which is great. It feels super tame to me. I



just feel like I'm making pop music.

R.V.B. - I see that you interned with Meredith Monk? Can you describe that experience that you had with her?

D.P. - She was really sweet. She wasn't around that much, but the few times I interacted with her she was very generous and kind. Her office was a little different than a lot of other offices because it was very close-knit. The people that work for her... they don't feel like they work for her... they feel like they work with her. It's like a family. There was not that much pressure. I guess I was really struck by how laid back and generous the whole experience was. I did the basic intern tasks there... I'd get a DVD, or I'd ship a package, or make an Excel spreadsheet. There was always an opportunity to learn about her work... about what she had done and what she was doing now... where she was. There was anecdotes every morning on what had just happened. It was a very friendly atmosphere.

R.V.B. - Did the experience of working with her inspire you in any of your music?

D.P. - I hadn't been using words in that much but I had been using some in the earlier recordings that I had done. She made me realize that you don't need words when you make vocal music and you can still tell a story. That was pretty freeing. I think the pressure of needing to say something and needing to know what you're saying and being really clear about your message can really freeze you up. You don't always know what story to put out there. A lot of her music is vocal but there

aren't any words in it. It gave me the confidence not to... A - either use words or B - if I do... they always don't have to make clear cut sense.

R.V.B. - You've made a few albums in your young career and your latest is "Bahar". With the previous releases leading up to Bahar, are there any similarities or differences that you tried to get across?



D.P. - I think I look for certain sounds. I like certain forms of editing that's pretty consistent with what I do, but I haven't really used my music education in any way. When I make music, I don't really worry about what key it's in or chords to use. I don't notate anything. It's all a lot of samples and a lot of voice, so I can kind of do whatever I want. For this record, I wanted to go back to when I played clarinet. I really, really like woodwinds. Strings are kind of boring for me and I think brass can be a little bit tricky to use it right. I thought I could do an album that had a lot of woodwinds in it. Just through necessity, I have to communicate with players and I have to score things out. This is the first album that I ever implicated anything for my solo work. I had to give people scores so that they could play it. That was a little bit of a departure from what I had been doing. I never really enjoyed looking at that standpoint of my music... theory wise. It ended up being healthy for me to have some structure because now if I do a performance, I can have a player use the sheet music that I wrote. It's nice to have that consistency.

R.V.B. - I heard the woodwinds on a few tracks. My opinion about the clarinet... my daughter played the clarinet and it's a beautiful sounding instrument. I think it's an underrated instrument and I know back in the day with Benny Goodman, Artie

Shaw, and the Dixieland revival era, it used to be more prevalent. It's nice to hear



it again in music.

D.P. - There are very few records that I can think of that have a lot of woodwinds in them. I did listen to some older music when I was making this record. I have a whole woodwinds playlist and of course there's some electro-acoustic stuff like oboe and tapes. Yeah, there is very little pop music with woodwinds in it. It's kind of weird. I wish people would use it more. It's really pretty.

R.V.B. - It definitely has a nice sound. Now you chose the name "Bahar" for your current record. I know it has multiple meanings. Why did you choose that name?

D.P. - I was listening to a lot of Turkish music and I kind of had a mental image of a Turkish desert. I was listening to a lot of clarinet and flute music from Turkey, so maybe this is why? I spend a lot of time on google translate because I like learning about languages. I knew the record should come out in the spring and feel like spring, so I wondered what the Turkish word for spring was? It's bahar. It also means Sea in Maltese. I thought woodwinds are pretty fluid sounding and I liked the idea of it to be a large body of water also. I like to find a word that has more than one meaning for my album titles. Sometimes it fits and sometimes it doesn't. I like the mental images that those both can be. It's great that it's a dual language word.

R.V.B. - The album cover is an abstraction of a spring and you also made a video of "Spring Revealed". They're both water related.



D.P. - Right. I had this idea that it was like a desert with this wealth of fruit and a well spring would kind of arrive in the desert and solve all of these problems... this utopian mental image. I have a friend... Antye Grele-Tipatti, and she lives in Finland. We've worked together on a few projects and she has always done ink calligraphy and has written poetry out with ink. She recently got into digital video editing. I totally fell in love with it. She put up a webpage and had some examples. They were live tour visuals for her husband because he plays shows. She processes video in real time and makes it into an organic... not quite nature, not quite techno tour, visual thing. I loved all of the screenshots that I saw... the still images that she put up. She was in New York last year and I asked her if she would do an album sleeve for me... and she said she would. I had this darker desert yellow background, blood red fruit fig, Turkish situation in my head. I gave her the colors that I wanted. She said she needed short video in order to loop the video and process it. What she ended up giving me was so close to what I saw in my head... both with the colors that I chose and seeing her work. It came out as close as she could get it without reaching into my head and grabbing it. I was really happy with it.

R.V.B. - It's a very interesting image. The video is not quite a spring, and it looks like a larger body of water which was mixed in with geographic images and an outer space feel.

D.P. - The guy who directed that video had done another video for me a while ago, and we stayed in touch. I did want to have a video for the opening track and have that well/spring image. I did the fruit thing but I didn't have the spring covered. So

I asked him if he would do a video for me. We had to use stuff that was in the public domain. He found more of a waterfall thing, but I was really happy with how that video turned out.

R.V.B. - Now the song titles on the album... you have some earthy things like "Springs Revealed", "Day Residue", "Forest Floor", but all of a sudden something like "Tennis" comes out? How did that come about?

D.P. Well, there's a weird suburbia undertone on this album, and I'm not really sure why? For instance "Sprawl"... when the forest appears and lets in some light, I'm talking about a housing development. With "Tennis", I had this image of someone in a suburban environment where all the houses look alike and are really close together, and they're jumping roof to roof in tennis shoes. I made the sounds in the song like a ping pong effect... back and forth. Like someone playing tennis. It's a nice clash with the more earthy stuff.

R.V.B. - Will you be able to perform these songs live?



D.P. - I'm working with one of my friends who's a better composer than I am. He studied composition, whereas I didn't. He's taking my small scores from parts on the album and dusting them off and adding arrangements and new compositions to the songs so that they are performable continuously. We have about 4 songs scored out so far and we did a few test performances with them and they sounded pretty good. There's definitely room for improvement but I think we are going to focus on doing a lot more in a couple of months, and then doing more performances of the whole thing this fall. I've also performed a few solo electronic versions of it, but that's more like backing track stuff which is how I normally perform. It was a big goal to me to try and get it to be performable in an acoustic situation and close the laptop. I hadn't done that with my solo work and I felt like I'm at a point where I could. Sometimes I need a little sound design in there just to tell the whole story but by and large, they can just be performed with an ensemble.

R.V.B. - It's not unusual to see someone perform with a laptop these days. The whole DJ fad is in full swing.

D.P. - Right. Well I guess it's more like I'm maybe getting bored or maybe the people that don't perform with laptops want to, like Radiohead who switched from guitars to electronics. I'm trying to switch from electronics to instruments. I think you just want to change it up. I don't think that one is better than the other. I wanted to prove to myself that I could do it.

R.V.B. - Right. Well I think you're on the right track and your music sounds really, really nice. I've enjoyed listening to it in the last few days.

D.P. - Thanks. There's a quote that's out there and I don't know if I'm saying this right but "We're in this life for satisfaction. We're not in this life to be understood." Not everyone is going to understand you 100% of the time.

R.V.B. - True. Everybody see's art in a different way. Thanks for taking this time to talk with me. It looks like you're off to a good start to your young career. You're on to something. Enjoy the rest of your day.

D.P. - You too.

Interview conducted by Robert von Bernewitz

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For more information on Derek Piotr visit his website <http://derekpiotr.com/>

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